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Promoting LGBT Equality in the EFL classroom

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ABSTRACT

This paper defends the importance of introducing and dealing with LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transexual) issues during an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. Such issues are key in promoting the value of equality within a language education context. Learning and teaching English is essential for the European Union's structure, and for this reason the classes are full of multicultural backgrounds. This dissertation will introduce the groundbreaking innovative inclusion of sexual and gender identity issues whilst learning a foreign language in its theoretical aspect, and also exposing a teaching proposal that allows for this connection between the English language education to take place in the most natural way. The main focus is promoting the equality for the LGBT community, therefore reducing the discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity that is such a serious issue for LGBT youth.

KEYWORDS: EFL, LGBT, gender identity, sexual orientation, equality

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INTRODUCTION

Last year, on May 17, a historic moment took place in the Balearic Islands' parliament (ABC 2016). The law that recognized the rights for the LGBT community was finally a reality. This was a long-awaited moment both for the Balearic Islands citizens who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transexual (BOIB 2016, 16818) and for the majority of the social community who support the movement. Once and for all there was a legal document signed by the government of the Balearic Islands which guaranteed the well-deserved rights for the LGBT community and also served as a tool to eradicate the so-called LGBT-phobia. A term which is closely connected to the unfair reality that “non-heterosexuality is still considered abnormal by many people in our society”. Enough reason why LGBT individuals can feel “devalued or struggle to resist internalizing society’s negative views about them” (Lorenzetti et al. 2014, 3). This social and ideologic power that heterosexuality enjoys is transmitted negatively through heterosexism which sets its base in defending that all the other sexual identities different from heterosexuality are considered inferior (Barozzi and Guijarro 2014, 132). Making heterosexuality seem normal or natural is the practice called heteronormativity, which was coined by the queer theory (Nelson 2002, 50). Considering the concept of sexual identity, it refers to “how one thinks of oneself in terms of whom one is sexually and romantically attracted to.” (Feminism and Women's Studies 2017).

Connected to what has been aforementioned regarding the dominance of heterosexuality, it can be said that we all live in a heteronormative system, as sexual minority identities (lesbian, gay, or others) still experience exclusion in some contexts. Heterosexism differs from homophobia in the fact that is “subconsciously reproduced in everyday interactions, texts, images and discourses” (Barozzi and Guijarro 2014, 132). An example of it would be the limited or even non-existent representation of LGBT individuals in school textbooks; or in visual media such as television series or films (2014, 132). That

is why heterosexism is even more dangerous than homophobia because it goes “unnoticed” (2014,132). This situation only comes to prove that there is no real, safe social system for LGBT individuals, and so the discrimination against them is favoured by the existent society. This is a matter that causes insecurity for those who identify themselves as part of the community due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is proven that, especially, high schools are the most insecure contexts, due to the fact that the presence of homophobia is major in the educative contexts (Pichardo Galán et al. 2007, 35).

Despite this negative view upon education regarding the security of its LGBT students, it is considered to be one of main areas of intervention that the recently-approved law in the Balearic Islands states to be efficient enough to tackle the issue of LGBT-phobia (BOIB 2016, 16822). Education can act as a force in order to battle against the discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. At this point of the paper, it is essential to give a definition of these two aforementioned terms which is given very clearly in the website of the nonprofit organization called Planned Parenthood by stating that

“Sexual orientation is about who you’re attracted to and who you feel drawn to romantically, emotionally, and sexually. It’s different than gender identity. Gender identity isn’t about who you’re attracted to, but about who you are — male, female, genderqueer, etc.” (2017)

It is undeniable to affirm the fact that LGBT students are at a higher risk of social exclusion, consequently of suffering discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Meyer 2010, 111). A project carried out by the organization called Cogam Educación demonstrates that, at least, 60% of students in Spain have witnessed homophobic verbal aggressions (Cogam 2016, 6). Even more alarming is observing that 15% of the students who participated in this study believe that LGBT individuals shouldn't have the same rights as the heterosexuals (2016, 7). Another study carried out by the Government of Spain comes to show that 25% of the Spanish youth between ages 15 and 19 have witnessed homophobic assaults in their high schools and a 20% shows a clear

rejection towards sexual diversity (Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades 2015, 17). This only comes to prove once again that both homophobia and heteronormativity are present in the Spanish educative system (Barozzi and Guijarro Ojeda 2014, 132). It is essential to take into account that this situation is not only present in the Spanish classrooms but in the whole world, as the UNESCO confirms, homophobic bullying is an universal issue (Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades 2015, 6).

The present issue is heavily put into contrast with the context found written in the official legal documents of the Spanish educative system. In the latest educational law that was approved in 2013, it is stated that equality and social justice are the base for a quality educative system in which everyone can feel they belong to. Plus, education is described as the tool that promotes the welfare of the whole country (BOE 2013, 2). It is also interesting to read that one of the principles in which the Spanish educative system is inspired on, is the one of transmitting and putting into practice moral values such as personal freedom, responsibility, solidarity, tolerance, equality, respect and justice (2013, 9). Even though the right of education without discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades 2015, 6), there is no specific mention of it in the law. Furthermore, in said legal paper one can find that there are seven competences which serve as the basis for a common knowledge which is aimed to be acquired by all students. One of them is the social and civic. This one also makes reference to the term equality, in this case the one between men and women. It also makes reference to respecting the differences and the human rights (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2017).

As it has been previously mentioned, this is not at all the situation that one can observe inside the classrooms. In said paper, the term equality seems to be treated perfunctorily, without really giving evidence of its importance or

seeing real figures claiming to be present. The consistent reality proves that equality for LGBT students is yet to be achieved. The term equality is quite an important one to tackle, as well as challenging to achieve but not impossible either. Its importance is projected in the fact that it is presented in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as one of the universal values in which the Union is founded on (Official Journal of the European Union 2012, 5).

Considering all the aforementioned, it is undoubtable the urgent need there is of tackling the sexual and gender diversity in the classrooms in order to have an equal environment in the schools where everyone feels welcome and respected no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. Schools are vulnerable spaces due to the amount of time that teenagers dedicate there but also because it is the place where most values are learned and taught. As Elizabeth J. Meyer states, “schools play a key role in teaching [...] the dominant values of culture and this holds especially true in the areas of gender and sexuality”. Moreover, much of the things that happen in schools to the youth are “gendered or sexualised”, and that is the reason why teachers need to have a deep knowledge of how sexuality and gender operate in the school system (2010, 3). This is why it is essential to use education as the main force in order to promote equality when regarding LGBT rights.

Having this in consideration, the objectives of this paper will be focused on integrating the teaching of English as a Second Language as a both educative and social force in order to ensure a safe environment for LGBT students and as a space to promote and hopefully achieve an equality within the educative system both in respecting others' sexual orientation and gender identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At a short glance, it may seem that teaching English as a Foreign Language (also referred as EFL) and issues such as sexual or gender identity seem far to be connected with each other. But actually they are more connected than one can perceive as.

First, this paper is going to focus on the usefulness of teaching EFL and its importance regarding the social matter of battling in favour of LGBT rights. In the latest educational law, the importance of acquiring a foreign language is defended as it has become a priority due to the globalization currently taking place. In addition, it is an objective marked by the European Union (BOE 2013, 8). The first foreign language that is taught in all the Spanish schools is English, because English remains as the “preferred option for communication among people from different first language backgrounds” (Seidlhofer 2004, 210). This dominion that the English language has, causes for authors to identify it as an “international language”, “lingua franca” or “world language” (2004, 210). This is the reason why it is unquestionable the fact that the English language possesses a worldwide influence. As Seidlhofer clearly explains, “For the first time in history, a language has reached truly global dimensions, [and the technology] has so far enhanced the social prestige attributed to typical global users of English” (2004, 211). In short, learning English is hugely important as it gives learners the tools for an international communication as well as more job opportunities at their availability.

This is quite a common situation in the Balearic Islands due to the massive arrival of tourists that takes place every year. By looking at the statistics, one can see that in 2015 there were 15 and a half million of tourists in the islands. The majority of them coming from English speaking countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, France, Denmark or Finland (Ibestat 2017). Due to this large presence of tourists, English has become a basic

requirement in order to get a working position. Especially when considering those professions that require contact with people. As Antonio Bruyèl exposes in his dissertation, the vast majority of tourists that arrive to the islands expect English to be the language they need in order to communicate (Ultima Hora 2011). Moreover, it not only serves as a requirement in the working field, but also sets for a social environment in which English is spoken with fluidity by a large number of people in the islands, so also it serves for a communication at a personal or emotional level between people whose first languages are different from each other. To sum up, the dominance of the English language comes together with a higher chance of opportunities, both at a personal and professional level.

When considering the situation of English language teaching in the Balearic Islands, it is essential to extract this information from the legal documents on education. Several points can be expressed regarding this matter. First, the English language begins to be implemented in the early stages of the obligatory educational journey. It is a core subject from the first year of Primary Education (BOE 2014, 19354) until the last course of Secondary Education (BOE 2015, 177). When it comes to non-obligatory educational settings, there are many pre-school centres that offer English immersion for the students. As well as in Bachillerato, the period following Secondary Education, where English keeps being a core subject (BOE 2015, 189).

A document that is essential to be taken into account in this part of the paper is the official curriculum of teaching the first foreign language (English) in Secondary Education. In it, the language gets divided into four components which are: comprehension of oral texts, production of oral texts, comprehension of written texts and production of written texts. Every aspect is then subdivided into three sections being contents, assessment criteria and learning standards (BOIB 2015, 25404). This is done in order to tackle the teaching and learning process of the subject more in-depth.

Said curriculum is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (also known as CEFR) regarding its focus in the communicative action. The aim is that students become competent enough to communicate depending on their profile and educative period. It is also mentioned that learning a foreign language allows students to grow on a personal level and provides them with a resource to achieve their cultural and professional objectives more effectively (BOIB 2015, 25404). Or, in other words, as the Framework for Languages states, “it is a central objective of language education to promote the favourable development of the learner’s whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture” (Council of Europe 2014, 1).

This objective of the Common European Framework for Languages starts to shed light on the connection between learning and teaching English to the social matter of LGBT rights along with promoting equality. Personality and identity appear here to be a key aspect in the whole experience of education connected with the culture as well. Perhaps the term that is of more interesting for the paper is the one of identity. As it has been previously mentioned, two terms that are within this sphere are the ones of “sexual identity” and “gender identity”. As it has been aforementioned, sexual identity refers to what one identifies when considering his/her sexual and romantic attraction to people. This term is more popularly known as sexual orientation, and from now on it is how will be written in this paper.

Inside the sexual orientation sphere in relation to identity there are several things to be taken into account. First of all, it is important to mention that this term is “differing, conflicting, and sometimes ethically troubling” (Dembroff 2016, 1) because it is not an easy one to define. Sexuality itself is a very fluid concept that depends on oneself’s perception so it is hard to find a definition which appeals to everyone. Sexual orientation can then be, generally speaking, subdivided into different categories or identities, the most well-known being

heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian and transexual (Unitarian Universalist Association 2017) which together compile the initials LGBT with the objective of representing a whole community and social movement. Despite having these four main identities, there is a long list of other sexual orientations which one can appropriate in order to fall into a category regarding their sexual and romantic attraction to others. This only proves once again that defining one's sexuality is complex and not straightforward either. As the American Psychological Association remarks,

In the United States the most frequent labels are lesbians [...], gay men [...], and bisexual people [...]. However, some people may use different labels or none at all. [...] Sexual orientation is commonly discussed as if it were solely a characteristic of an individual, like biological sex, gender identity or age. This perspective is incomplete because sexual orientation is defined in terms of relationships with others. (2017)

Then, it can be stated that sexual orientation is not a choice that one makes at their please, but rather an extension or a part of one's personality and identity. Our sexual preferences define how we establish relationships with others when there is a romantic or sexual attachment.

Sexual orientation can also be troubling in the sense that belonging to a certain category can also define and influence the social perspectives towards those individuals who define themselves as part of the LGBT community. This is in the existence of stereotypes surrounding the different sexual identities, which only promote LGBT-phobia. Since the mid-20th century, LGBT individuals have been discriminated due to their sexual orientation not being the one of heterosexuality (American Psychological Association 2017). This discrimination can be projected in different ways. The autonomous organization Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades in Spain gives a clear note of the five different types of LGBT-phobia that exist. The first one is the cognitive which is manifested in the thought that homosexuality, bisexuality or transexuality are unnatural identities, a sin or that LGBT people shouldn't have the same rights as the heterosexual ones. The second is the affective, which is transmitted through feelings of reject and horror towards LGBT people. Another

type is the conductual, which takes place in active exclusive behaviours. The one that is harder to notice is the liberal, which consists in thinking that the public space should exclusively be heterosexual and that same-sex affection needs to only occur in a private space, as they are perceived to be disrespectful. The last one is the institutional, which is when the LGBT-phobia is part of the institutions' regulations (2015, 12).

Apart from sexual orientation as part of one's identity which should be enjoyed as an objective in the educative field, there is also the concept of gender identity. The American Psychological Association defines this term as “a person’s internal sense of being male, female or something else”. This is closely connected to the one of gender expression, which consists on how a person expresses its gender (2017). Gender identity may seem as something quite straightforward for the majority of the population. It is socially expected for someone to be cisgender, that is finding that “gender is on the same side as their birth-assigned sex” (Aultman 2014, 61). But in reality it is not as simple. This is when transsexuals come into place in this discussion. The moment in which an individual feels that their gender identity does not match their biological sex is when transsexuality originates. Although, just as sexual orientation, both gender identity and consequently transsexuality can also be problematic concepts in the sense that they do not appeal in the same way to everyone. Normally, when someone identifies himself or herself as transsexual, he or she wills to alter his or her body in order to match their gender identity. This is done through surgery or medication (American Psychological Association 2017). Although, this not always applies to all transsexuals, as it is proven by a survey carried out with over 27,000 respondents, only a 25% of them had undergone surgery (2015, 93).

As well as homophobia exists, there is also a place for transphobia. Discrimination towards transsexual people is quite overwhelming as the report by The National Center for Transgender Equality shows. In the survey, nearly half

of the transexual participants declared they had been verbally, physically or sexually attacked in the past year (2016, 198). In another study, some of the key findings were that racism plays a major role when it comes to discriminate transgender people, being the African American women the most affected. Plus, 40% of the respondents in this study claimed to have tried to commit suicide at least once in their lives (Grant et al. 2011, 2). As a consequence, it does not come as a surprise that transexual students are also victims of transphobia in their schools. It is disturbing to observe that 77% of transexual students have had negative experiences regarding their gender expression (dressing) or have been physically or sexually abused during their school years. Moreover, a 17% was forced to leave their schools due to the gravity of the mistreatment they were suffering (Grant et al. 2011, 131).

This is also a situation that is present in the Balearic Islands. Due to the heaviness of the issue, the government decided to publish a protocol with the objective of protecting transexual students from transphobic bullying in the schools (Ultima Hora 2016). In said document, it is stated that gender identity was recognized as a reason prohibited to be discriminated for, by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from 1976 (Govern de les Illes Balears 2016, 1). Since then, equality has been one of the main objectives to be achieved by the European Union. In the matter of discrimination based on gender identity, it was last recognized in the European Parliament Resolution of 28 september 2011. In which it “reiterates its concern regarding the numerous human rights violations and widespread discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, both in the European Union and in third countries.” (European Parliament 2013). Apart from it, in the Spanish constitution it is also recognized that everyone is equal to the law without any discrimination based on sex, race, religion, opinion or another personal or social situation (Govern de les Illes Balears 2016, 1).

Although, once again, the real situation does not match by what it is constituted in the official, legal documents. As it is explained by the protocol published by the government of the Balearic Islands, young transsexuals' diversity in their human condition is not always visualised, comprehended or integrated due to the sexist and transphobic beliefs that inhabit in the social grounds. It is essential to note that education is once again recognized as a tool that can transform the situation, by incorporating a system in which the diversity is central, including a sexual-affective perspective as well as having gender identity as a key subject in order to promote the values of equality and respect (2016, 5). In this matter, it was proven by study with Spanish teachers in terms of sexual diversity and gender identity in the classroom, that the most visual discrimination regarding gender disconformity among students occurred when a boy was behaving in a feminine way (Pichardo Galán et al. 2016, 26). In this document it is also presented the noteworthy ignorance that the majority of the teachers had in order to acknowledge the presence of LGBT students in their classroom (2016, 29). When facing homophobic or transphobic discriminative situations among students, the most notable reason in order not to intervene by the teachers is their lack of formation, consequently of information, in order how to tackle the situation (2016, 33). This was also noted in another previous study by Octavio Moreno in which he points out that this absence of teacher training in the sexual-affective approach, affects both at an academic and personal level. Teachers' ingorance on sexual and gender diversity is undoubtable (2009, 113-114). In the most recent investigation, it is alarming to see that a 60% of the teachers who participated stated that they had never received a specific training to put into practice when homophobic behaviours or situation were present. This is something that the organization COGAM demands, a specific training on sexual-affective diversity for the future Spanish teachers during their teaching formation course, as well as schools having anti-homophobic bullying policies (2016, 17). Considering all the aforementioned, it can be stated that we are in a situation that is not at all beneficial for those students that are part of the LGBT community. Moreover, it is not only for them but for the overall group of students

if we want them to receive an education based on the values of diversity, equality, and respect.

Previously mentioned in this paper, homophobia and transphobia are present in the Spanish educative system. One of the branches of it is language education, more specifically to interest for this document is the one of English as a Foreign Language. This is represented in the fact that it exists a heteronormative social stability inside the classroom, presented “through images of heterosexually based societies: through marriage, romance, and the life stories of both fictional and real subjects” (Liddicoat 2009, 191). That is, sexual minorities are not present in the EFL classroom, and heterosexuality is the norm which rules all sexual identity possibilities. For example, this dominance that heterosexuality possesses (also referred to as the social reality of heteronormativity) is the fact that the schools' curriculum consists on restrictive lessons when it relates to sex and gender (Meyer 2010, 61). This system of heteronormativity can also be seen in the fact that the school staff has its own assumptions regarding gender and sexuality, this is referred as the 'hidden curriculum', filled up with homophobia and transphobia as well as with the presumption that everyone working at the school is heterosexual (Pichardo 2009, 115).

Central to this social and educational situation is the author Cynthia D. Nelson who has dedicated several studies towards the inclusion of LGBT themes and queer theory inside the English language classroom. This author observed that there was an increasing interest by her peers in examining the implication of identities' representation in language teaching and learning, and that just very recently the “sociosexual dimensions of identity” started to be acknowledged but still “very rarely investigated”. More significant for her, which later became one of her main topics of research, was the fact that queer studies were “oddly overlooked” when dealing with identity research in language education, despite its major impact in other areas of study such as gender

studies, literary criticism, social sciences, cultural studies and media studies (Nelson 2006, 2-3). Nelson's central suggestion is that language education “would surely be enhanced by thinking of education settings as multisexual spaces” as well as recognizing these sociosexual realities having a close relationship with language and culture (2006, 4). It is important to note that previous to Nelson, there were two authors who were considered to have an “uncommon adventurousness” due to the fact that they were some of the few who introduced queer theory within language education. The first one is Robert Ó'Móchain who was a teacher in a cultural studies course at a Christian women's college in Japan, where he included queer issues in a heteronormative environment, in which the students were not used to discuss such issues in class. He managed to successfully generate a debate about language, sexual identity and gender with his students. With the same dedication, there was another author called Greg Curran who pointed out the challenges he faced when trying to answer students' questions regarding the hegemonic power of heterosexuality. He proposed alternative ways in order to engage students to deconstruct this power that heterosexuality enjoys (2006, 5-6).

Nelson's specific interest in the topic of LGBT initiated when she noticed that, when browsing ESL (short for English as a Second Language) students' material and textbooks, as well as the curriculum, these documents were dominated by straight people communicating only with other straight people. Her question was then if these monosexualising techniques “that permeate the literature of language education are limiting our collective efforts to foster multilingualism” (Nelson 2006, 1) which had been a matter given little consideration by other authors in the educational field. It is important to clarify that multilingualism refers to the acquisition of two or more languages (Sridhar 1996, 47). Consequently, EFL teaching is the educational area most affected by multilingualism (1996, 66) as it has been aforementioned by the author Barbara Seidlhofer, that English remains to be the language of choice among people

whose first language is different. In connection with this, Nelson continued to claim that, as LGBT students are part of our culture, and this is closely related to what an ESL typifies, therefore it should be a central matter for the subject teaching. Moreover, Nelson defends that sexual identities are ordinary aspects of our daily lives (Nelson 2006, 6). With this in consideration, queer theory is “well suited to support the work of ESL learners and teachers” (Nelson 1999, 388) as the groups are interested in analysing cultural practices, whether it is by criticising or learning them. Therefore, Nelson comes to defend queer theory by reflecting that it offers a “flexible, open-ended framework for addressing lesbian/gay issues within linguistically and culturally diverse groups” (Nelson 2002, 44). It serves as a guidance in order to cause useful debates about the topics of sexual identity and its connection with other matters, such as language and culture; as well as turning the attention to sexual identities “within everyday patterns of thinking, speaking, learning, and working” (Nelson 2006, 6-7).

Considering what it has been aforementioned, it is key to define the term 'queer' which is

mainly used as an umbrella term to include all LGBTI people [...] and all those who feel marginalised as a result of their sexual/ gender identity and orientation [...] a fluid term which does not constitute a particular fixed social identity (Barozzi and Guijarro Ojeda 2014, 132).

Taking this into account, queer theory's central objective is questioning “the privileged status of heterosexuality by conceiving of sexual identities not as private matters, but as performative acts that have shaping force and societal significance” (Dumas 2008, 4). Queer theory originated in the mid-1980s and set its base in the cultural invisibility of LGBT individuals, considering their lesbian, gay, bisexual or transexual sexual identities both as culture acts and the “subject of critique”. A relevant work that influenced the birth of this “school of thought” was Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* published in 1990. (Meyer 2010, 20). What is central to queer theory is both representing the minority sexual identities as well as challenging the notion of sexual identity (Nelson 2002, 46-

47). With queer theory, one can achieve a more inclusive environment inside the classroom as not only the dominant sexual identities (lesbian, gay or bisexual) are discussed but also the minority ones, at an equal level. The queer perspective offers “a more fluid and expansive concept of identities and expressions” (Meyer 2010, 20). Then, anyone can feel welcome and part of the class group. As queer theory problematizes all sexual identities, this can be presented positively through the teaching practice in the sense of exposing acts of identity as complex and changing instead of being transparent. Moreover, making reference to the fact that not everybody applies to “a clear-cut identity category” (Nelson 2002, 48). This can be translated into questioning what purpose these identities serve, what is their work and what contradictions are associated with them. This is contrasted with the teaching practice of alienating the minority sexual identities from the socially accepted heterosexual one. Nelson specifies that dealing with sexual identities “might be relevant to anyone, not just gay people” (2002, 49) as gay-friendly teaching is considered to be of importance only to a small group of students and/or learners (Nelson 1999, 373). Everyone can participate in the discussion. Through this inquiring teaching perspective, we can be closer to achieve equality and respect inside the classroom. Queer theory allows for an emphasis on inquiry instead of inclusion, as this last one is worse for the minority sexual identities as it exposes them by being different from the heterosexual one. The objective here is to “understand how language, culture, and social interactions operate with respect to all sexual identities” (2002, 50). Sexual identities are then as broader spheres connected with culture and language, and this is mainly positive during the teaching practice as it allows students to eliminate possible prejudices they may have connected to a certain sexual identity, allowing to provide an open-minded perspective to them, possibly reducing any type of discrimination from schools and hopefully from most domains of society (Meyer 2010, 22).

Nelson defends the positive consequences of queer inquiry within EFL education in the sense that if it wasn't done, it would carry out negative outcomes in different levels. First, at the pragmatic level, it would force limits to the language learners in order to develop their fluency. Second, at an ethical level, excluding LGBT matters is “a way of enforcing compulsory heterosexuality, which hardly seems an appropriate role for language educators and researchers” (Nelson 2006, 7). In contrast with this, there are also positive outcomes originated from tackling LGBT issues in the classroom such as making the students feel safe from discrimination, improving the students' physical and emotional health, acknowledging the existent diversity, as well as making our students feel engaged and consequently improve their academic results (Meyer 2010, 4).

Nelson is key in recognizing that “sexual identity is already an integral part of ESL” (1999, 373), making her different from her colleagues. As well as proposing pedagogical implications that can be implemented when the topic of sexual identities makes an appearance during an ESL/EFL classroom. Previous to her, there had been authors who defended the so-called “lesbian and gay identity framework” (1999, 376) in order to tackle or, at least, promote a gay-friendly teaching perspective. But Nelson prefers to rely on queer theory in order to include LGBT identities in the EFL classroom as it is more transgressive and challenges the clear-cut definitions of identities, which only cause for exclusion for those that are the minority, as opposed to the heterosexual. She defends that the previous one is harder to implement as it can rely on stereotypes or that is too difficult to include and be inclusive at the same time (1999, 376-377). She exposes this very clearly in the implication that “an emphasis on including minorities can serve, however unintentionally, to reinforce their minority status” (1999, 377); and that is not what it is intended when trying to promote LGBT equality in the EFL classroom. The practice of minoritizing a certain social or cultural group does not rely in the value of equality.

By following an inquiry approach, one needs to acknowledge that the domain of sexual identity can be important to some people for several reasons, to examine all the sexual identities, not only the dominant ones. Moreover, to look at the different ways of producing sexual identities in the different cultural contexts. To be able to identify the changing cultural norms that belong to the sexual identities as well as exploring the negative and positive aspects of identity. Lastly, to consider sexual identity as related to other acts of identity (1999, 377). A practical way in order to introduce this inquiry into the classroom followed up by a discussion on LGBT sexual identities can be the formulation of key questions such as “Why do people sometimes want to be seen as gay or lesbian?; Is it easy to identify someone as straight?; In our country which sexual identities seem natural or acceptable?”. An inquiry perspective like this is hugely beneficial as it allows both learners and teachers to question what may appear as the only valid option, to then introduce different perspectives of the topic (1999, 378).

In one of Nelson's texts, she actually put into practice this inquiry perspective with a group of 26 students at a community college in the United States. The activity was to show students a series of pictures where they could see same-sex couples in the street. The idea was to ask students to interpret these images, by doing so it served to “underscore the uncertainty often associated with reading sexual identities.” (1999, 387). This activity allowed students to consider the possibility that the couples shown could be in a love relationship, or maybe they were just friends, workmates or even family related. The key idea in this task is that there is no right answer for each picture, but the objective is to make the students consider the possibility that the two people shown in the picture can be in love, and so making same-sex affection be “placed within the realm of the everyday along with, e.g., eating and gift giving” (1999, 387). Some of the challenges that Nelson encountered with this experience is that, first, there is an existent uncertainty as to what is the interest that the students have with this topic or what is their opinion about it. The other

challenge is in finding ways of working with sexual identities without marginalising any of them (1999, 387). When observing the students' responses, they corresponded to the queer theory's view of sexual identities as culturally acts as part of everyday interactions. Moreover, they symbolised the pressure of producing socially accepted sexual identities as well as shaping “not just sexual behaviour but other aspects of social interaction” (1999, 388).

Nelson defends that, in order to make education more LGBT-friendly, there are several strategies that need to be taken into account. The first one is to address heterosexist discrimination and homophobic attitudes. Next, by introducing LGBT topics into teaching practices and also in the curriculum. It is essential to have the educational needs of the LGBT students very present. Moreover, it is extremely important to create learning environments where anyone (both learners and teachers) can be open about their sexual identity without fear of discrimination (Nelson 2002, 45). Apart from these methods, Nelson offers five strategies in order to “fully exploit the pedagogic potential of queer themes and perspectives in fostering language learning” (2006, 205). The first one consists on recognizing the fact that sexual literacy is part of linguistic and cultural fluency. Due to the fact that sexual identities are interpreted differently depending on the culture they are set in, language learners need to become familiar with this language and its ideals. As incredible as it may seem, there are countries where homosexuality is banned or LGBT rights are still non-existent such as Iran, Nigeria or Russia (The Guardian 2017). Some of the students that Nelson interviewed in her book-length study the fact of “being able to interact as an openly gay person, and with other openly gay people, was actually the motivation for moving countries” (Nelson 2006, 206). This enhances the argument that sexuality is represented in the connections between discourse, information, identity and community; and as Alexander and Banks state, this is what students need to learn, in order to eliminate their ignorance when it comes to the close relationship that sexuality and identity have in our culture . By doing so, learning a language involves learning which sexual

identities are communicated among the speakers of that certain language (2006, 207-208).

The second strategy that Nelson proposes deals with the queer inquiry abovementioned in this paper. From her interviews with teachers, Nelson could observe that both teachers and students had concerns when dealing with sexual diversity in the classroom. At the same time, Nelson could see that the approach that was most effective in order to frame sexual diversity as a subject matter was the “discourse inquiry” as it seeks LGBT perspectives by recognizing “the limitations of producing such categorizations in the first place” (2006, 209). The third strategy is related to the existence of heteronormativity. Nelson's suggestion is to take advantage of homophobic remarks that students may articulate during a class, and consider them as opportunities to pose questions related to homophobia or heterosexuality as the social norm. As opposed to focusing on what one believes (2006, 212). This is the reason why teachers need to question which values will prevail in their classes and how their teaching practices might support a heteronormative thinking. As Britzman states, “heterosexuality must become viewed as one possibility among many” (1997, 194), this is why it is essential to tackle discussions where all sexual identities are involved. In contrast with this, excluding sexual diversity from the teaching practices “constitutes an insidious form of heteronormativity (Nelson 2006, 213). The fourth strategy deals with the reality that both students and teachers are multisexual in the sense of self-representation. This is visualised in the fact that in any teaching contexts there are going to be students or teachers who are questioning their own sexual identity. For this reason, it is essential to integrate tasks that can be addressed to students of any sexual dimension, at the same time enabling communication with their peers. Students should be free of how they want to present themselves in the classroom in terms of their sexual identity. This is connected to the objective of trying to make the classroom an environment in which coming out “is supported, though never required” (2006, 214).

The last strategy deals with teachers' resources in order to tackle queer issues in the classroom. As Nelson could observe by herself, there is an existent lack of published learning materials in which there are sexual diverse characters or subjects. This provokes teachers to feel unprepared in the way of addressing the different sexual identities in an intercultural classroom. In this sense, for the teachers involved in Nelson's investigation, it meant "a unique opportunity" to reflect on this matter (2006, 217). There is an undoubtable need for teachers to demand queer topics in the professional publications, both as students resources and research studies.

On a similar note, in a study abovementioned carried out in Spain, the principal advice given to the teaching staff is to educate in the value of equality towards sexual diversity and gender identity. Moreover, it is essential not to presuppose the dominance of heterosexuality. When in the class context, it is advised knowing how to react upon homophobic or transphobic comments by students, this would make the LGBT pupils feel safe in our classroom. In addition, showing the consequences of homophobic bullying can be effective too (Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades 2015, 43-45). In a previous study, Moreno proposed other recommendations such as including the education on sexual-affective diversity in the official documents of the schools, collaborate with LGBT organizations, showing comprehension when facing homophobic incidents or behaviours, and trying to support the LGBT student and showing respect to him or her. (2009, 120-125)

TEACHING PROPOSAL

Taking in consideration all the aforementioned in this paper, a teaching proposal is going to be presented which its main focus is going to be the integration of LGBT issues, such as sexual and gender identities, in the context of an EFL classroom. The objective here is to promote the value of equality and its importance for the LGBT community, as well as teaching English language contents. This teaching proposal would ideally be implemented throughout a complete year course. It is composed by several individual sessions or tasks which feature different vocabulary or grammar points in order to be introduced at any time for a range of different levels within the Secondary Education system in the geographical context of Spain or the Balearic Islands. It is important to note that these sessions and/or tasks should not be taken in isolation to the rest of the others planned for the groups, as LGBT issues are just as important as others in terms of dedication and educative and/or social importance. The idea is to integrate sexual identities into the curriculum in a way that feels natural, and not imposed to the students or anyone in the school community. It is going to be a matter raised several times throughout the year course, this is projected in a way that keeps reminding students and the school community that there is a consistent strategy to discuss the matter, and not by at all means it is considered to be a single, different session or part of the course.

It is important to mention the competences that the students will be encouraged to develop and work with in all these lessons or tasks proposed. In the most recent educational law there are seven competences which are conceived to be of extreme importance in order for the student body to acquire a complete personal and social development which fits in the globalized world we live in (BOE 2013, 97864). In this teaching proposal, there are three competences which are of special consideration. The first one being the one of linguistic communication. This one is central for the subject of English language,

as students are constantly learning about grammar, vocabulary, the different styles and functions of the language and its diversity considering the different contexts in which we can find the English language. Moreover, the four main skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) are considered within the communicative competence. Students are expected to learn how to express orally in different communicative situations, to comprehend a variety of texts, to express in a written format in different forms or formats, and to listen with attention controlling and adapting its answer considering the requirements of the situation. In this competence, it is essential to consider the dialogue as a tool to for communal living, as well as having the willingness to produce a critic and constructive dialogue (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2017). Considering this competence, it is essential the concept of coexistence for the LGBT issue, and stays closely connected to the value of equality well-defended by the European Union organizations as it has been previously mentioned before in the paper. Without equality, it is challenging to live together in harmony.

The next competence that is important within this proposal is the social and civic. Students learn about the different codes of conduct found within society, perceive the concepts of social equality, justice and human rights. In addition, showing tolerance in their speech as well as interest in order to solve problems. Respecting the differences and the human rights come as essential aspects within this competence (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2017). It is desired that the students acquire them, in the sense of respecting the different sexual orientations or gender identities to which people can identify, and understanding that “gay rights are human rights”. This last quote was announced by Hillary Clinton in a fundraising dinner for a LGBT organization in New York (The Independent 2017). This only symbolises the importance that this competence has when in connection to the fight for equal rights for the LGBT community.

Lastly, the competence of cultural awareness and expression needs to be considered. In this one, students develop the ability of having different perspectives about a cultural concept. More importantly, they learn about respecting the right for cultural diversity and the dialogue between cultures and societies (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2017). LGBT issues are very closely connected to culture. People acquire knowledge or behaviours depending on the culture they have set in to. For this reason, sexual orientation is an aspect that is heavily influenced by culture (Meyer 2010, 50). Culture also affects in the creation of stigma and stereotypes surrounding sexual or gender identities. As Meyer explains, Western cultures depicted homosexuality as an illness and imposed the heteronormativity in its societies (2010, 52-53). This is the reason why it is essential that students learn about cultural diversity and accepting the different cultural possibilities out there regarding the spheres of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Considering this, the first teaching proposal is related to family stereotypes connected to the general assumption within society that a family has to be composed by a mother and a father. This is another example of heterosexism which only projects discrimination. This is the reason why Meyer states that educators need to “think beyond these boundaries when working with youth in order to better meet their needs” (2010, 40). Considering her point, the activity's objective would be to extend students' understanding about the diversity there is regarding families. This can be done by deconstructing the image of a closed, universal sense, and instead acknowledging its different variants as it is connected to the different sexual and emotional relationships that people establish with others. Learning about LGBT types of families, therefore living in diversity, is also learning about living in society and so preventing discrimination (Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades 2015, 18). LGBT families is one of the main points in the study carried out by the Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades along with the one of sexual diversity and gender identity. Even though they

may seem to be invisible, the reality is that many children in schools have families that are not purely heterosexual (Meyer 2010, 7). Due to the alarming fact that LGBT families are often excluded from school life or that their children suffer discrimination, it is important to tackle the issue of family diversity in class with the objective of being inclusive (2010, 52). Regarding teaching this matter in foreign language education, it is an action that was already suggested in a study by the organization Cogam (2007, 24).

This first 55-minute lesson proposed in this paper, is destined to be implemented to a younger group of students, in a first or second of ESO would be ideal. However, it can be applied in older groups if the teacher believes it is necessary to tackle the matter with the students. This activity is created around the objective of practicing the new vocabulary that the students have learned about family units. The warm-up would consist on the teacher writing the word 'Family' in the blackboard, and asking students what words are related to it. The idea here is that they think about the different persons that are expected to be in a family as, for example, 'mother', 'father', 'sister', 'brother' and so on. With this exercise, we are not only making the students revise and think about the vocabulary of the unit given, but also starting to consider family as a broader term. Once that first activity is completed, it is time for the main task in which students will be asked to write a short text describing their families. Before they start doing that, the teacher is going to give them an example of what they are expected to do. At this moment, the teacher shows a text in which a boy describes his family, in which there are two dads instead of a mother and a father (annex 1). The objective with this text is making this same-sex family be perceived as normal as possible for the students. One student will be reading the text aloud and some reactions can be expected when they learn about what type of family it is. After the text has been read aloud, the teacher will highlight the key phrases that the students need to include in their own writings, such as sentences as it is: 'In my family there are...'. Next, the teacher would ask students some questions about this family. The focus here is making them think

about this type of family, with questions such as 'Does Tom has a mother and a father?', 'Where is Tom's mother?', 'Do you think they are a happy family?'. Students can have different reactions to this family, as they have probably never (or hardly ever) seen this type of family in a language classroom. With this activity, the students are introduced to an LGBT issue in a way that feels natural or necessary to talk about, as not all families have the same heteronormative structure. It is important here to also make students reflect about other types of families such as interracial, adopted or single parents. The main idea is making the students realise that all types of families can be happy and not necessarily all of them need to have a mother and a father. With this didactic proposal, we are not isolating LGBT issue from others, but including it in a social sphere very important for the students as are the families.

The lesson would then conclude by students writing a description of their families, so that they practice the vocabulary that they have learned in the unit. When they finish it, they have to give it to the teacher so that they can have them back corrected for the next class. At the end of the class, it can be interesting to show students a Coca-Cola commercial (annex 2) in which different families appear. The curiosity of it is that all of them are quite opposed to the heteronormative family structure. In said commercial, it appears a single mum, an adopted Chinese girl, and a boy with two dads. This video once again is a great tool to integrate LGBT issues in a subtle way for our students, as they are not treated in isolation but instead in connection with other social matters such as other types of families. This is all done with the objective of integrating the value of equality within our lessons, and also deconstructing the assumption of heterosexual families' leadership in society.

The following activity proposed would incorporate a deeper reflection about issues regarding sexual orientation, gender identity and family diversity. This would be better be implemented in a group of first of Bachillerato due to the vocabulary expected to be produced and the thinking behind it. First of all,

we would ask the students to divide themselves in groups of 4 or 5 people so that there are three different groups in the class. Then, each group will have a letter addressed to them by someone asking for advice. We have previously told the students that they own a blog in which people submit questions in order to seek for advice with their relationships, or general matters. Each group has to agree in the same solution for the person that has written to them. Everyone in the group has to give his or her opinion in the matter as it is an activity in which we want to encourage team work, as well as the importance that everyone is equal in it. There are three texts (annex 3). The first one is written by a 16-year-old guy who has recently noticed that he pays more attention to other guys at his school, specifically when he is in the lockers' room changing clothes to go to his football training. He has been feeling like this for over a year, and he doesn't know what to do. He is not too sure if he is gay because he also likes girls in his school. He does not know if he is bisexual or he is just being curious. This case is important as we are directly introducing the topic of biphobia into the classroom. Discrimination towards bisexual people is even worse than those who are homosexual as a result of society being binary, people are expected to either be homosexual or heterosexual. That is why bisexual people have more difficulty in finding social acceptance (Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades 2015, 14).

The next text deals with a 19-year-old girl who describes that, since she was very little, she has liked the typical masculine things such as playing with cars, having her hair short, watching sports on TV, and so on. Moreover, she feels that her body does not match how she really feels. In short, she feels as a man. She is very confused about it and does not know if she is mentally ill and should go to a psychologist in order to “get over” it. She is afraid that her boyfriend would break up with her for this, even though she loves him very much. This goes straight to integrating transgender issues, as well as establishing the existent difference that there is between gender identity and sexual orientation (Brighton and Hove City Council 2013, 8). This is seen in the

fact that the protagonist feels the same way for her boyfriend even though her self-perception (or gender identity) has shifted.

The last text deals with two married women who have a 3-year-old daughter who next year is going to start school. They are concerned about this because they don't know what is going to be the reaction of the school towards having a girl who has two mothers. It is important to note that this school is religious. It is the only school that they have in their village so they have no other option. They already don't feel connected to the community of neighbours in the village, so they are scared that her daughter may feel alienated from the group or even suffer homophobic bullying because of their family. This text once again is connected to the topic of LGBT families, this time involving a possible discrimination that the daughter may suffer due to the family that she has, as well as having religious beliefs coming in the situation as threatening for the well-being of the girl.

Once the texts have been given to the groups, they have to read the texts together, discuss the matter given and write a solution for this person. At the end of the class, each group has to come up in front of the room and explain the case that they have been given and the proposed result that they have agreed on in order to tackle the situation. The lesson can finish by having a discussion about the different situations that have appeared in the class so that everyone can give his or her own opinion about it. With this activity, the students have the opportunity to reflect about these issues and, not only provide their own perspective, but also having to agree with other people in confronting the situation; therefore producing their communicative competence. In addition to this, in terms of learning the language, the students have the opportunity to practice their reading, speaking and writing skills. From a grammatical point of view, they are revising structures of advice (use of conditionals in sentences such as *If I were you...*), and agreeing or disagreeing in a discussion. Plus, teamwork is encouraged as all the members have to participate in the task,

enhancing then the value of equality. Moreover, with this activity the students can get to practice a dialogue which is constructive as they have to respect each others' opinion on the matter. If this happens to be homophobic, it is important to consider Cynthia D. Nelson's statement that “homophobic comments or exchanges can be considered openings rather than closings” (2009, 212). Openings in the sense that they serve as an opportunity to establish a discussion about the matter.

The following activity deals with Oscar Wilde's homosexuality which immediately connects English culture with LGBT issues, further linked with the cultural awareness and expression competence. Oscar Wilde is worldwide known for his novel titled *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and his play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Britannica 2017). The activity is destined for a group of fourth of ESO as they will be asked to read a newspaper article in that presents misconceptions about the Irish author¹. One of them being that he had a romantic and sexual interest for men. He had an intimate relationship with Alfred Douglas, and this costed his imprisonment in 1895. Wilde was accused of sodomy by the marquess of Queensberry, Douglas' father (History 2017). At that time, in the 19th century, homosexuality was a taboo in society. There were laws prohibiting 'indelicacy' in public, as well as “gay sex behind closed doors was made a criminal offence”. (Victoria and Albert Museum 2016). Considering this, Wilde had to hide his sexual orientation in order to gain some social acceptance. He ended up spending two years in prison, and last three years of his life in exile (History 2017).

Treating this episode in the life of the author in a language classroom is innovative in the sense that normally the literature authors that are taught in the schools are heterosexual. Or, at least, are assumed to be, as it is known that they had romantic or sexual relationships with people of the opposite sex. Oscar Wilde's hidden reality would provide students with a broader view of sexual

1 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/may/07/top10s.oscar.wilde>

diversity when it comes to English literature authors. When it comes to the language, the objective with this task is that students identify the main linguistic characteristics that a newspaper article should include, and the vocabulary used. Once the article has been read in the class, the students would be asked to write a newspaper article exposing Oscar Wilde's biography. They can do it in pairs and can make use of laptops if they are available, in order to find more information about the author and decide what parts of his life they want to include. In this sense, the students are free to include his homosexual reality. This is done for the mere fact of not forcing students to introduce LGBT issues. This only makes the matter be more natural for them instead of treated in isolation. This task in particular would engage students' cultural competence as they are learning about an important figure of the Irish culture, as well as practicing their skill of writing in a newspaper article style, connecting with their communicative competence which is so central in learning English.

Once the students have finished and handed in their newspaper articles about Oscar Wilde, it can be interesting to start a little discussion by making students reflect on the harsh reality in which LGBT individuals had to deal with in past times. This can be done by showing them a scene from the film titled *The Imitation Game* that exposes the story of the mathematician Alan Turing, who managed to break the enigma codes that were sent by the Germans during the Second World War. He was a key element for the victory. Despite being considered as the “father of modern computer science”, he was imprisoned for his homosexuality in 1952. He admitted having a sexual relationship with another man. After that, he was forced to take medication, an experimental 'chemical castration' in order to cure his sexual condition. This is quite a controversial case in English history, and it has not been until 2013 that Turing has received royal pardon (The Guardian 2017). Through the story of this mathematician, students are further exposed to the extreme homophobia that was existent decades ago. It can be interesting to formulate the following question to the students: 'Do you think the situation is better now for people who

are homosexual?'. What we can expect from this, is a positive general answer. At this moment, it is important to acknowledge to the students that the situation has improved for the LGBT community, as now there are several countries in the world where there are rights for them, such as the same-sex marriage (ABC News 2017). Despite of this, there are countries where the discrimination is still strong, such as is the recent case of gay men being "beaten and humiliated" in concentration camps in the Russian territory of Chechnya (Independent 2017). This would help students in realising that the LGBT community is still suffering from discrimination, despite of the achievements that they have acquired in the last two decades. Students work with their cultural competence in that they acquire a broader view of the existent reality there is when concerning LGBT rights around the globe, not only in the context of the Balearic Islands or Spain. In addition, it can create an interest in them to further investigate about the topic, with the objective of creating empathy and make them be more aware of the possible discrimination that they themselves have been witnessing in class to a LGBT classmate. It is essential to take in consideration that with this last task described, the teacher is not imposing any views towards having students need to be in favour of LGBT rights, but merely showing the pure reality that they are living by showing them real newspaper articles that expose the issue that the community goes through nowadays. This is done in the sense that students acquire their own thinking and personal opinion about the issue. Again, by not imposing to have a certain position we are helping in making the matter arise own perspectives and students for themselves acquiring the position they want regarding the issue. The teacher is merely a provider of the information, but rather it's in the students' hands the decision of what they consider about all that has been exposed.

An important matter that needs to be covered within this teaching proposal is the one of treating the disconformity between sex and gender, that it is the main cause for discrimination based on gender identity. This is based on the social acceptance existent regarding the binarism between sex and gender.

A significant percentage (33%) of the students has suffered discrimination because they have apparently broken this binarism. Cases such as a guy being perceived as effeminate, or a girl being perceived as masculine (Pichardo and de Stéfano 2015, 97). Transphobia is a reality that can only be tackled effectively through a decent training for the teachers in order to better identify these cases of discrimination when they take place and have the tools to assess the victims (2015, 7). This is why in this didactic proposal it is considered to be essential to include an activity in order to tackle this issue with the students.

This task centers around a slam poem written and performed by Alysia Harris and Aysha El Shamayleh in a festival called Brave New Voices (YouTube 2017). This poem tells the story of a young student who identifies himself as a man, but he was born with the feminine sex. It shows the struggle that he goes through in high school as he has to face the discrimination and is not happy as he cannot live with the body that he has. In order to introduce this poem to our students, the teacher would tell the students that they are going to read a poem in which it is described a problem that a student, just like them, is having at their high school. It is important to not give a gender to the person described, that is why it is advised to use neutral words such as “person” or “student”. The students would have to try and guess what is the issue that the protagonist has. In pairs, they read the text of the poem. The content is not very challenging so this activity can be done with students of third or fourth of ESO, mainly because the subject matter of transgender is perhaps more challenging to be tackled with a younger group of students. In this case, the students would have to share their opinion about what the issue is. The objective here is to make them realise that this issue is actually related to gender identity, as the person in the poem is transgender. The teacher can make it more clearly by highlighting some key phrases in the text such as “She doesn't want to have to explain to her mother for the 232nd time why she doesn't want to wear a dress to prom, Doesn't paint her face it's cause her whole body is painted on” (Genius 2017).

Here, students are exposed to the struggle suffered by transgender individuals, as they do not feel matched to their biological sex and so society, in this case the mother, do not understand it. It is also necessary to focus on the final verses on the poem which are

“James falls back into Melissa’s skin,
And the two comfort each other in a syncopated heartbeats,
Waiting for the day when Melissa can finally scrub off this made up genetic make up,
When the teacher asks for James and he can say "I’m here” (Genius 2017).

Regarding this final verse, it is presented the long-awaited result that transgender people demand, which is the social acceptance and recognition of their gender identities. Just a simple name calling it is shown by the poem as the wanted resolution, in order to feel like oneself. The poem manages to visualise this issue very clearly and this is why it is chosen to depict and introduce the matter of transexuality to the students, as it can be a challenging point to tackle as transgender students are a very vulnerable group, which can suffer both transphobic and homophobic discrimination (Brighton and Hove City Council 2013, 9). In addition, the teachers' training in this matter is quite limited. As the official protocol for transgender students in the Balearic Islands defends, it is important that teachers receive the tools in order for these students be allowed to develop their personalities freely, receive a quality educative attention and do not suffer from discrimination (Govern de les Illes Balears 2016, 6). Actions such as referring to the student by the name they prefer, not only verbally but in the documents of the school can be very helpful. In addition, respecting their choice of clothing, avoiding activities in which students get separated by their sex, allowing transgender students to go to the bathroom they feel more comfortable are just examples on how to achieve an equal environment for the transgender or transexual students that are in our schools (2016, 11).

Regarding the activity above described, playing the poem's performance can be highly amusing for the students. In said performance, the writers are behind each other, grabbed by their arms, reciting simultaneously and they are constantly changing places in the stage. This is done in order to visualise the both identities that the protagonist of the poem possesses (James and Melissa). It is powerful to see how the performance finishes by the two writers holding hands, symbolising the union and tolerance towards the transgender youth. (annex 5). By watching the performance, not only the message of the poem is visualised and perceived more clearly for the students, but also the power of poetry as a form of literature is introduced and can reach students in order to grow interest for this genre. In this sense, the linguistic communication competence is engaged by identifying the type of text (the poem), and being able to acknowledge the impact that language carries in people (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2017). In this case, transgender individuals can feel empowered by reading and watching the poem's performance, as their struggle and reality is identified and defended. This is further connected to the social and civic competence, as well as the cultural awareness and expression.

The following activity could be done with a group of fourth of ESO or first of Bachillerato. Its focus is on discussing stereotypes about sexual identities. Students would be asked to be separated into groups of 3 or 4 people. Each group will be given a list of sentences that expose social assumptions that some people have regarding LGBT people (annex 6). In groups they read the sentences and discuss with the members what is their opinion about these stereotypes. With this, students would practice agreeing or disagreeing with something, consequently the structures of "I agree with.... because..." or "I disagree with.... because...". After each group has finished discussing the stereotypes, the teacher will give each student two cards, one red and one green. The teacher will proceed to read the sentences aloud for the class. For each stereotype, the students will have to raise one of the cards depending on their personal opinion. Red meaning that they disagree, and green meaning that

they agree. It is important to communicate to the students that there is no right or wrong answer in this activity, they just have to show their opinion. It is essential that students feel free to expose their opinion without feeling rejected by their classmates. Respecting each others' opinion and the liberty of expression is one of the key elements within the cultural awareness and expression competence (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2017).

It could be engaging that the teacher, once he or she has seen the cards showing the students' thoughts in each stereotype, he or she formulates questions regarding the stereotype given. With the intention that the students who are on the 'agree' side eventually shift to the 'disagree' side. Again, in a way that does not feel enforced, but instead learned unconsciously. Considering this, sentences as “this is not true”, “do not believe this” or “you are wrong” (when observing a student's opinion) need to be avoided at all cost. The objective here is to initiate students' realisation of the unfair nature and existence of the stereotype and its own harmful intention on their own. It is significant to consider the possibility that this task may not reach all of our students in the same manner or intent for the wished aim. But that is why it is important to bear in mind that by having several other implications regarding the equality for the LGBT community, and witnessing the fact that students start to be aware of the situation is more than enough to feel satisfied with the result of the activity. Providing students with tools to acquire critical thinking about LGBT matters is what is central, not only for this activity but for the whole teaching proposal that is being presented in the paper.

Another activity that can be interesting to work with would be the one of asking students to execute an oral presentation about a key moment in LGBT history. This task is preferably destined for a group of first of Bachillerato, as they can produce a more elaborate language, have the ability of selecting the most relevant content in a formal text as well as designing the presentation in groups. Considering the fact that this is a matter in history that the students

probably know little about, it can be useful to introduce the topic of LGBT rights history by showing students a news' report video which highlights the most important achievements regarding the fight for LGBT equality (annex 7). After showing this video, it can be interesting to ask students if they knew about all these historical events and if they know about any other significant events for the LGBT community in any other parts of the world. Regarding this, it can be interesting to remind them that Spain was one of the first countries in the world where same-sex marriage was legalised (BBC News 2017). Following that, it would be helpful if the teacher provided students with a list of the most important events that have taken place in order to fight for the LGBT rights². From this list, students in groups of 3 need to select one of the historical events. After a few classes they would have to give an oral presentation to the class in which they explain this historical event and its importance for the LGBT rights' battle. It is essential in this case to give guidelines for the students, as time limitation, what contents need to be included, the design of the PowerPoint, and so on. What it is achieved with this activity is that students are creating their own content regarding LGBT issues, become aware of the importance that LGBT rights possess by realising that it was and it continues to be a battle to achieve a state of equality. Regarding the competences, students are undoubtedly practicing their communicative competence as they will be reading and speaking about the historical event chosen. Moreover, the cultural and social competences in the sense that students acquire a deeper knowledge into the history of LGBT rights in different contexts. It is essential to consider that students are asked to provide their own opinions on the matter. With this, we are making students work with the right of freedom of expression, which is a key element within the cultural awareness and expression competence (Ministerio de Cultura, Educación y Deporte 2017).

² <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/key-dates-lesbian-gay-bi-and-trans-equality>

The following activity is one that Nelson exposes in one of her studies (1999, 371). It involves queer inquiry, which is heavily defended by the author as the most fitting teaching approach to include LGBT issues within language education, as it helps in acknowledging the fact that “sexual identities are, in fact, plural; and that they pertain to ordinary aspects of daily living rather than being restricted to sex acts” (2006, 6). As a consequence, students acquire a far-reaching view and understanding of sexual identities in an educative context, which challenges the existence of LGBTphobia. The task consists on showing students a series of pictures (annex 8) in which there are different couples and family units represented doing mundane things such as having a cup of tea or watching television. The couples show a diversity in the sense that not all of them are opposite-sex (or heterosexual). This exercise is well designed for a group of second or third of ESO as they are started to be introduced into practicing the most basic modals such as *may*, *might* or *could*. When the teacher is showing the pictures, a key sentence can be stated about it. For example, *In picture 1 there is a girl and a boy reading a book*. After that, it is the students' turn when they have to deduce what type of relationship do the persons in the picture have. They can do this by using the modals of deduction that they have learned previously. For example, some examples of expected answers from students can be sentences such as *They may be best friends* or *They may be a couple*. In this activity, it can be really interesting seeing the reactions of the students in the sense that maybe some of them can feel opposed in assuming that two girls or two boys can be in a romantic relationship. Therefore, the teacher's position should be on simply questioning why they cannot have this romantic relation, instead of assuming that they are indeed in love with each other. This helps in making LGBT influence simply an option, instead of forcing it. This is connected to Nelson's queer approach in dealing with LGBT topics during a classroom. As the author states, queer theory involves “allowing for a range of sexual identities to be referred to or discussed throughout curricula rather than only in relation to certain so-called gay topics” (1999, 377). With this approach, a positive perception of diversity in love is

provided, as well as in the family units. In the sense that the task sets an opposite view to heteronormativity. Not all couples are formed by a man and a woman, in the same way that not all families have a mother and a father either. This idea engages the students' social and civic competence as they obtain a deeper insight into the concept of equality in the matter of sexual identities, in relation to further comprehending the terms of justice and human rights. In regards to the cultural awareness and expression competence, they are exposed to a cultural diversity. In connection with this, Meyer states that in foreign language education, the interesting point is to expose different sexual identities and then identifying “the nuanced meanings, norms, and expectations with regard to sexual identity that are associated with the language/culture being studied” (2010, 44). Moreover, it is an activity that makes the practice of modals being more engaging and appealing for the students. They not only practice the language content but also questioning and embracing sexual identities into their speech, in an autonomous way.

The following activity deals with a song titled “Same Love” by the artists Macklemore, Ryan Lewis and Mary Lambert, that was released in 2012 in their sophomore album (iTunes 2017). It is a song that deals with LGBT rights and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In it, the artist shows his unconditional support for the equality of the LGBT community (Washington United for Marriage 2017). The task would consist on giving students the lyrics (annex 9) and ask them to underline all the past simple verbs that they can identify. It is an activity designed to be done in a group of first or second of ESO, as students are starting to identify the difference between regular and irregular past tenses. As the song features both types of verbs, it is interesting to see how the students manage to identify the two types when put together in the same text. Moreover, and most importantly considering the paper's topic, it is a song that exposes the issue of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity that is suffered by the LGBT community.

When students have finished underlining the verbs, we can then proceed to correct it on the blackboard by distinguishing between regular and irregular. Once that is finished, we can continue by analysing the meaning of the sentences that are written in bold, and discuss what the singer wants to express. The objective here is that students provide their own points of view and identify that this song is pro-LGBT rights. The discussion of the sentences in bold is better to do it with the whole group of students, so that everyone can participate, and the opinions are shared with the rest of the group, and not in isolation as if it had been done in couples or small groups.

To finish the lesson, it could be a great tool to show students the official music video of the song (annex 10) in which it features the story of a man since he was a little boy until he dies. It shows scenes that deal with the meaning of the song, showing that he identifies as gay since he was a little boy, in adolescence he's shown insecure inside a club with other heterosexual couples, and when he's an adult he has a relationship with another man. Moreover, he is seen coming out to his family which do not have a positive reaction. By the end of the video, the couple gets married (YouTube 2012). This video can help students to understand the meaning of the song more clearly, as the language in the lyrics can be a bit complex for them to grasp at a first glance. In addition, considering the students' age (12 or 13 years old).

Another activity that is related to show students an insight into LGBT history, concretely in England, would be watching the film called *Pride* (annex 11) which was released in 2014. This film centers around the true story of how an organization formed by LGBT individuals helped the National Union of Mineworkers during a strike that took place in the summer of 1984 (IMDb 2017). The activists' group, called Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners, managed to raise £ 11,000 to help the families of the miners (Wales Online 2017). At that time, the miners were on a strike as a protest against PM Margaret Thatcher's intention to privatise the coal industry. The National Union of Miners needed

fundings in order to survive during their strike (BBC 2017). One of the groups that offered to help them was the so-called Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners. At the beginning, the miners rejected the LGBT organization's help despite the fact that Margaret Thatcher publicly conceived them as “the enemy within”, causing to decrease the donations for the cause. When it came the moment when the miners met the organizations that have helped them by collecting money, the LGBT organization felt welcome and accepted. The union between the two groups became stronger, and the miners thanked their help by marching with them in the London's annual Pride celebration in 1985 (Palmer 2017).

This film provides EFL students with an insight into a true historical event in an English-speaking context, as well as into acquiring more knowledge regarding the fight for LGBT rights from over two decades ago in the country of England. This task fits best for a group of first or second of Bachillerato due to the fact that it demands a level of the language competent enough to understand fluently the dialogues of the film. To make it easier, the film can be played with subtitles. Before watching the film, we can ask the students if they know of any relevant LGBT event that has taken place in England or of any other place in the world, in the sense of fighting for LGBT equality. When the film is finished, it would be ideal to create a discussion in which students reflect about this historical event, and provide their personal opinions about the film.

The listening, speaking and writing skills are the main areas being developed during the task. Moreover, students would expand their social and civic competence in the sense that the values of equality, the different European cultural dimensions are exposed; as well as further comprehending the concepts of justice and human rights (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2017). In the film, this is presented by the unusual alliance between the LGBT individuals and the miners, there it exists an equal relationship among two minority group that have the same objective: to have their rights be

approved and no longer feel oppression from politics. Culture is a rich component involved in this activity, as the film exposes different cultural backgrounds when considering the characters' sexual orientations and personal interests. Justice is what moves both groups to fight for their rights. Moreover, students are exposed to the culture of the country through scenes of the film. By seeing the characters, its personalities and its customs. Besides that, politics play an important role in the film, not only for the miners' strike but also for the LGBT society. Students learn how oppressive the rules are for the community and also, by the end of the film, they can get a clearer view of the harshness in the battle that meant for all the LGBT residents in England during the 1980s.

CONCLUSION

Tackling sexual identities in the EFL context may be perceived as two very separate spheres but their connection is a hidden reality, considering the major influence that education has on society when it comes to teaching values. Education has the force of instructing positive social conducts to the current young generations. With it, establishing and assuring a social environment that is focused around the value of equality. This is the central point that this paper wills to establish as the objective that serves as a justification for including LGBT issues into the teaching practice of English as a Foreign Language. Learning English is an opportunity for students to be within a multicultural context as this language is spoken by more non-native speakers than those to whom English is their first language. Concretely, there are about 1 billion non-native English speakers, in contrast to the 375 million first-language speakers (Graddol 2000, 10). This clearly exposes the linguistic dominance that the English language has all over the world. The reality is that English is “the most widely studied foreign language in the European Union” (2000, 44). This fact allows the English language education to reach an audience much more bigger

than in other languages. Consequently, the social values transmitted can reach quite a vast number of people. This provides competent tools that not other educative contexts possess. This is why English is the area chosen to include LGBT contents in the educative system. It is important to mention once again that English is a core subject from the first year of Primary Education (BOE 2014, 19354) until the last course of Secondary Education (BOE 2015, 177). Meaning that a person, when he or she is 6 years old, is starting to be fully exposed to the language, therefore to other contents that the teacher may wish to deal with. Although, LGBT contents in this case are aimed to students in their Secondary Education phase.

Connected to this, English classrooms are occupied by a range of students coming from different cultural perspectives. This context allows the teacher to have a rich opportunity that is the one of multiculturalism. This is the perfect example that can be found in the English classrooms of the Balearic Islands' high schools, where the presence of foreign students is appreciable (Orte and Ballester 2016, 52). In the last year course, a total of 26000 foreign students were registered into the system, 2200 more than the previous course (2016, 158). In addition, 132 different nationalities are represented within the current educative system in the Balearic Islands (2016, 159). This involves 132 different cultures in one single community. Having such a vast range of cultures comes along with different perspectives of the world. This establishes a multicultural context. It is essential to take into account that "human beings are culturally embedded" and so the concept of equality is central for the social welfare within a multicultural context (Parekh 1998, 408). Equality is quite a broad term to tackle and it can be applied at different levels, but as this paper has been referring to, the one regarding the assolution of equal rights for the LGBT community comes as a fundamental one to consider.

LGBT equality is still an innovative concept to be regarded within an educative context, specially the one of teaching English as a Foreign Language.

There has only been one author, Cynthia D. Nelson, who has tackled the issue in detail since 1993. She did so in several journal articles and in a full-length book (Barozzi and Guijarro Ojeda 2014, 133). This only visualises that there has not been an extensive research regarding the issue and more specifically with the didactic method that Nelson suggests, which is the one of queer inquiry. To this study in particular, it is exposed as the perspective that best suits the matter, as it facilitates the students' own reflection and formulation of their own ideas regarding the matter. The aim is to introduce LGBT issues as necessary for the development of the students while taking into consideration their social and civic competence. With this teaching perspective, they can clearly grasp the importance that the value of equality holds for the LGBT community and so the urgent need to be the main objective in order to achieve the desired reality of having equality, without any type of discrimination based on one's sexual orientation or gender identity; which happens to be a rough issue that LGBT individuals have to face in society.

By including LGBT issues in the EFL context, students are not only increasing their awareness of this harsh reality, but moreover the teacher is creating a space where LGBT students can feel safe, or at least more understood. As it has been abovementioned, queer students are at a higher risk of suffering bullying during their school years. This is a situation that needs to be avoided, and one of the ways it is believed to put an end to it is by being sensitive towards the LGBT community's present reality of social injustice. It is by believing that no one should have to suffer discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Being different from the heteronormative reality should not have to mean being discriminated for it. Everyone deserves an equal treatment, not just only by their sexual orientation or gender identity but in other matters such as their religion, country of residence, and so on. Learning English should be just as important as acquiring values of equality, tolerance, respect towards others. By this, we are assuring a better environment for everyone.

Having this into consideration, this paper then wills to establish a premise for assuring a better environment and quality education for the students who feel part of the LGBT community, or who suffer discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The activities abovementioned are all unified by the insistance and need to improving the lives of the ones who are judged by who they love or by who they are. It is a matter that involves all ages, sexes and nationalities. This is just a step forward towards the full equality for the LGBT community, who has been long suffering this harsh reality and only now is starting to feel more accepted and safe within the societies. However, as it has been presented, the discrimination is still there. By focusing on the value of equality, it can be assured that equal rights are a reality for the LGBT community.

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ANNEXES

1) Text describing a same-sex family

My name is Tom. I am 12 years old. I love my family. I have a dog called Moon. My father Greg is a doctor, he helps sick people in the hospital. He is very nice. He is tall and thin. My father Bill is a painter, he works at home. He is very creative and funny. He has blonde hair and brown eyes. We are very happy together. We like going to the cinema, going to the park with Moon or cooking nice meals in the kitchen.

2) Coca Cola commercial showing different types of families.



3) Texts for relationship or general advice

TEXT 1

Hi. I need advice in something that has recently been happening. For like a year or so, I noticed that I look at guys differently than I did before. For example, when I am in the lockers' room changing to go to football practice I find myself staring at other guys. This is something that I never did before. I don't know if I'm gay. The weird thing is, I still feel attracted to girls. I don't know what to do or if I should tell somebody. I feel ashamed and I'm worried somebody in the football team finds out because maybe they will kick me out for this. Maybe I'm bisexual? I read online it's possible, and that many people identify as bi, but I don't know if this is my case. I'm very confused. What should I do?

TEXT 2

Hello. I'm Caroline. I have a serious problem and I don't know what to do. Ever since I was little I have liked the typical "masculine" things such as playing football or playing with cars. When I started high school, this changed a bit and I started being more feminine. I even fell in love with a guy, and I have been dating him for three years now and I'm very happy with him. But, still, I have this feeling coming to me from time to time that I don't feel like a girl. More recently, when I look at myself in the mirror, I don't feel identified physically. I think my body doesn't fit me at all. I don't know how to face this. I'm particularly worried about my boyfriend's reaction, I don't want to lose him. But I'm not entirely happy with who I am. I'm completely lost, and I don't know what should be my next move here.

TEXT 3

Hello. We are two women living in St. Steven's with our beautiful 3-year-old daughter. She is starting school next year. The thing is that in our little town, which is very conservative, there's only one school and it is very religious. We can't take her to another school because the others are very far away from where we live and we both work near the town so it wouldn't be convenient for anyone. We love the town because its views are spectacular and the house we live in is what we always dreamt of. Although, it is true that regarding the community we don't have any social life with any of the neighbours, as from the moment we arrived and they knew we were two mothers, we sort of felt rejected by them. Actually, we don't care as we are two grown ups and we have our friends outside the town and our families are very open. But we are scared that our daughter is going to have a hard time at school just because she has two mums. Specially considering how religious the school is. Should we be truly worried about her or we should let it go and see what happens?

4) Text of the poem "Hir" by Alysia Harris and Aysha El Shamayleh

Melissa sits in the back of the classroom afraid to grow,
 speak up, Mad at God who couldnt relay a message directly
 She pulls akwardly at her extra loose khaki cargo to her hormones that they should produce more
 pants, testosterone,
 She doesn't want the boys to notice her. The only person who understands her is James,
 James finds himself at the back of a classroom, And they have been playmates since the age of
 His baseball cap casts a shadow on his pimple four,
 stained forehead, Around the time girls notice boys and boys notice
 A wide shirt hangs from his broad shoulders, girls,
 But no one ever noticed him. See James' family wanted daughters instead of
 Melissa sons,
 The teacher asks, And Melissa was always like that male beetle
 And she says nothing because she is not here, that everyone called a ladybug,
 And Melissa has never been here, Melissa, Melissa where is she?
 Because Melissa is just some abstract jumble of Sometimes she wishes she could rip the skin of
 syllables that doesn't fit her position, her back,
 She is not what she seems, Every moment of everyday feels trapped in the
 She doesn't want to have to explain to her flesh of a stranger,
 mother for the 232nd time why she doesn't want Melissa,
 to wear a dress to prom, As she stands to her feet wanting to say
 Doesn't paint her face it's cause her whole body "I'm here, I've been here since I was born, so quit
 is painted on. asking me if I'm a him or a her, Cause when you
 Melissa, Melissa combine the two pronouns you get H.I.R,
 James doesn't want to have to explain where he Hir,
 came from, And God combined the two genders and put me
 Cause with the exception of Melissa he has been in this body transgendered,
 deemed an abstract reality by everyone, I'm here so quit talking about me like I'm not
 All he wishes for is to get to wear a tuxedo to here."
 prom. James falls back into Melissa's skin,
 And Melissa has been tucking in breasts that will And the two comfort each other in a syncapated
 be growing for three years now, heartbeats,
 Been using duct tape to press them down and Waiting for the day when Melissa can finally
 mould them more into pecs, scrub off this made up genetic make up,
 She just wishes that people would understand When the teacher asks for James and he can
 that at birth her genitals didn't know which way to say "I'm here."

5) Performance of the poem “Hir” by Alysia Harris and Aysha El Shamayleh



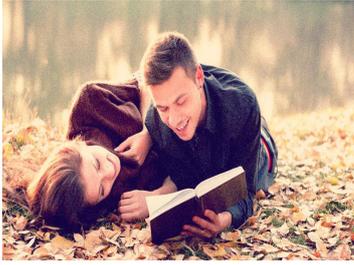
6) List of stereotypes regarding LGBT people

- Feeling an attraction for a person of your same sex means that you are gay or lesbian.
- All gay men are effeminate.
- A homosexual person always has sexual desires for his or her friends of the same sex.
- Homosexuals are promiscuous.
- Homosexuality is an illness that can be cured with a medical or psychological treatment.
- Decades ago, there were less gays and lesbians.
- In every homosexual relationship, there is a “man” and a “woman”.

7) News' report video about LGBT history



8) Pictures of different couples and families



9) Lyrics for the track “Same Love” by Macklemore, Ryan Lewis and Mary Lambert.

When I was in the third grade I thought that I was gay,
'Cause I could draw, my uncle was, and I kept my room
straight.

I told my mom, tears rushing down my face
She's like "Ben you've loved girls since before pre-k,
trippin'."

Yeah, I guess she had a point, didn't she?
Bunch of stereotypes all in my head.

I remember doing the math like, "Yeah, I'm good at little
league."

A preconceived idea of what it all meant
For those that liked the same sex
Had the characteristics

**The right wing conservatives think it's a decision
And you can be cured with some treatment and religion**

Man-made rewiring of a predisposition
Playing God, aw nah here we go

America the brave still fears what we don't know

And "God loves all his children" is somehow forgotten

But we paraphrase a book written thirty-five-hundred years

ago

I don't know

And I can't change

Even if I tried

Even if I wanted to

And I can't change

Even if I tried

Even if I wanted to

My love

My love

My love

She keeps me warm

She keeps me warm

She keeps me warm

She keeps me warm

If I was gay, I would think hip-hop hates me

Have you read the YouTube comments lately?

"Man, that's gay" gets dropped on the daily

We become so numb to what we're saying

A culture founded from oppression

Yet we don't have acceptance for 'em

**Call each other faggots behind the keys of a message
board**

A word rooted in hate, yet our genre still ignores it

Gay is synonymous with the lesser

It's the same hate that's caused wars from religion

Gender to skin color, the complexion of your pigment

The same fight that led people to walk outs and sit ins

It's human rights for everybody, there is no difference!

Live on and be yourself

When I was at church they taught me something else

If you preach hate at the service those words aren't

anointed

That holy water that you soak in has been poisoned

When everyone else is more comfortable remaining

voiceless

Rather than fighting for humans that have had their rights

stolen

I might not be the same, but that's not important

No freedom 'til we're equal, damn right I support it

(I don't know)

(chorus)

We press play, don't press pause

Progress, march on

With the veil over our eyes

We turn our back on the cause

'Til the day that my uncles can be united by law

When kids are walking 'round the hallway plagued by

pain in their heart

A world so hateful some would rather die than be who

they are

And a certificate on paper isn't gonna solve it all

But it's a damn good place to start

No law is gonna change us

We have to change us

Whatever God you believe in

We come from the same one

Strip away the fear

Underneath it's all the same love

About time that we raised up... sex

(chorus)

10) Music video for the song “Same Love” by Macklemore, Ryan Lewis and Mary Lambert.



11) Images from the film *Pride*

